

## **Toast proposed to the Diocesan Jubilarians - 2006**

We celebrate eleven Jubilarians tonight.

Is this an all-time record for the diocese?

Certainly it is not likely to be surpassed in the foreseeable future.

If I were to speak about them separately,  
that would allow me less than a minute for each one.

Instead I have chosen to leave the personal reflections  
to the celebrations in the parishes and families,  
and shall adopt a wide-angle, rather than zoom-lens, approach.

The eleven reflect a diversity of backgrounds.  
Three have had previous experience as religious – priest or brothers.  
One of the eleven hails from Ireland.  
Two have spent much of their priestly lives working in third-world Churches.  
Another has had a stint at secular employment.  
We have had a seminary lecturer, a military chaplain.  
We have a bishop, a monsignor,  
and we can boast a variety of academic qualifications.

Four have retired from full-time ministry,  
a couple are in wind-down mode,  
and one is still working overseas.

They illustrate in microcosm the diversity of our diocesan presbyterate,  
the wealth of experience, the diversity of gifts.  
They demonstrate also the power of the Spirit to draw us into unity.

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The sixty years that have passed since the oldest one, Bill O'Halloran, was ordained  
have been years of unprecedented change.

Wonderfully, through it all, and despite the strains,  
they have kept together,  
challenging, supporting, enthusing, and growing.

Bill was ordained a Redemptorist in 1946 at a time  
when the Redemptorists were numerous, proud of their history, enthusiastic,  
sure of themselves and the direction of their ministry.  
Parish missions were still of unquestioned importance.

The Second World War was over.  
In the previous year, with the dropping of two atom bombs on Japan,  
humanity realised that, for the first time in its long evolutionary development,  
it had progressed to the stage  
where it could finally wipe itself off the face of the earth.

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Ten years after Bill, 1956, the five Golden Jubilarians were ordained,  
Henry, Les, Dan, Ron and Damien.

They had grown up in a Church that was still  
an uncluttered Church, an unconsulted Church.

The diocesan curia was contained in Leo Fiscalini's briefcase,  
and later that of Billy McCunnie.

The CEO and REC was Fr John Shelley.

It was a Church that was certain of itself,  
proud of its Pope,  
and had all the answers.  
Latin was its language,  
and everything everywhere in the world was believed to be the same and unchanging.

It was an era when the power of the Parish Priest went unchallenged,

When they were ordained in 1956, Curates had no rights,  
and even senior ones still worked under the control of decrepit parish priests..

They were ordained to a priestly work that was clearly defined:

- YCW leaders group,
- catechetics in the numerous little State Schools peppered around the diocese
- and the even more threatening High Schools and Technical Schools, (with absolutely no previous formation)
- constant parish visitation,
- hospital visitation
- instructing converts, and couples entering mixed marriages (twelve sessions of at least one hour each)
- confessions every Saturday morning and evening,
- First Friday Communion rounds
- and golf, tennis, squash and, for those who managed to get away with it, football.

Then Pope John XXIII, elected two years into their priestly lives,  
convened the second Vatican Council.

The revolution that occurred in its aftermath  
in catechetics, liturgy, scripture and theology generally,  
saw the beginnings of In-Service programs in the diocese.

The Council had barely finished when cultural change hit the Western world.  
bringing a radical questioning of authority.  
Educational methods changed,  
children were encouraged to ask questions,  
and *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 saw adults  
either acquiescing like infants,  
rebellious like teenagers,  
forming their own consciences,  
or walking away.

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Half way through the priestly life of the Golden Jubilarians – 1981 -  
the Silver Jubilarians came on line:  
the two Johns, Cain and Monaghan, Peter Sherman, Mick McKinnon, and Justin  
Woodford.

Four of the five of the ordinands were born and bred in the Baby Boomer years.  
(They weren't born when the Golden Jubilarians started at the seminary in 1948).  
They grew up in the post Vatican II Church  
that to them has simply been "life as normal".

By the time they were ordained in 1981,  
expectations of priesthood had changed:

The lay apostolate had virtually dropped off the radar,  
and Liturgy and liturgical ministries had taken its place.  
Confessional boxes had become store rooms.  
Collaborative ministry was the norm.  
Priestly life meant consultation, and meetings:  
priests meetings, parish meetings, national meetings.  
It was the age of programs,  
and of the RCIA.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Ron Mulkearns, both locally and at the national level,  
they came into a diocesan Church that was more alert  
to their personal and ministerial needs.  
Not long after ordination the Ministry to Priests Program was launched,  
and they found ready mutual support and encouragement.

Their twenty-five years have been years of collaboration  
not only with the Golden Jubilarians but with all the priests of the diocese.  
Over that time the whole presbyterate has grown to recognise and to be at peace with

each others' diverse attitudes and aptitudes.

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Together all our Jubilarians have faced an era of

- sexual revolution (last Saturday's *Age* reminded us that the Bikini swim suit showed up the year that Bill was ordained).
- the drug culture,
- the recognition of the world as a global village,
- the rise of IT technology,
- a growing feminist awareness –

all of which have had a considerable impact on us and our ministry.

They have seen growing (or continuing) dissent in the Church, and widespread questioning of vocation by many of their contemporaries.

They have witnessed a gradual, but strikingly large, fall-off in Church attendances, and a parallel drop in vocations to priesthood.

Former certainty has given way to uncertainty; triumphalism to humility.

Generation X and Generation Y are puzzles to both Golden and Silvers alike.

Without exception, the eleven we congratulate tonight are still committed to the Church, to the priesthood, and to the world which they serve.

I believe that that could have happened only through a deep inner searching and a fearless facing of the question: Where do I stand?

Karl Rahner has been quoted as saying something to the effect that:

*Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will need to be mystics,  
or they won't be Christians at all.*

What is true for the whole Church is particularly true of us priests.

We congratulate our Jubilarians;

we thank them for their faithfulness,  
their friendship,  
the example and service they continue to provide to us all.

To the Silver Jubilarians, particularly, in the prime of their lives,  
we wish all the best  
as they move forward into a new, unknown and, I believe, exciting, Church  
in process of formation.